

State needs new dams, reservoirs

By Tim Johnson and Joel Nelsen Special to The Bee

Like a gift card buried in a dresser drawer, it is easy to forget the promise of a previous season.

Just seven months ago, the Legislature passed a \$7.5 billion water bond. It was California's gift card for water with funding for groundwater cleanup, environmental projects and improving our ability to move water to places that needed it most.

It included \$2.7 billion for more water storage. And not just any storage – for surface storage.

We were in the room when the final details were being put together. No one was talking about groundwater storage. For the first time in decades, there was open, clear support for additional surface water storage.

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Not to be forgotten was the overwhelming support for a bond that included new reservoirs. Only two members of the Legislature voted against the bond in August. When put to a statewide vote, the bond passed with 67 percent of the vote, the highest for any ballot measure in November.

The opposing campaign clearly cited its concern about building additional dams as well. There can be no doubt the Legislature and the people of California thought they were voting for more reservoirs.

Surface storage is the first and most important part of a comprehensive water solution. Even the areas of the state with the greatest potential to recharge groundwater require a steady supply of water to fill the underground aquifers. Other than the few short months of heavy rains, that water will come from a reservoir.

Surface water storage also benefits the Delta and the environment. A primary requirement of the bond is that 50 percent of the benefits accrue to the public with an emphasis on the Delta. As new reservoirs are managed specifically to improve water releases for salmon and decrease salinity, these benefits will be clearly seen.

For example, the proposed Sites Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley would allow more water to be released for the four runs of salmon in its rivers. Sites would also support the winter flooding of rice fields that are critical habitat for the millions of birds that migrate along the Pacific Flyway.

The proposed Temperance Flat Dam in the San Joaquin Valley would provide certainty to communities such as Porterville, Lindsay and Orange Cove that totally rely on federal water for daily use. Temperance Flat would also help



refill the San Joaquin groundwater basin by directing runoff to recharging basins that otherwise could not handle the water all at once.

Today's angst and handwringing over new reservoirs should be seen for what it is – at best a lapse in memory. At worst it is an attempt to reverse the clear mandate that a long-awaited comprehensive solution to the state's water problems include all options – even dams.

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